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Deutschland

Philologische Fakultät

Ibero-Amerikanisches Forschungsseminar

Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Studien
Spaniens – Portugals – Lateinamerikas

Frankophones Forschungsseminar

Zentrum für transdisziplinäre Studien
Frankreich – Maghreb – Kanada – Karibik

Leipzig, 20. June 2014

Speech Prof. de Toro

Esteemed colleagues:
Vice-rector, colleague Matthias Schwarz,

Academic Dean of the Philology Department, colleague Beat
Siebenhaar

Dear Burkhard Jung, Lord Mayor of the City of Leipzig

Dear Professor Fine, dear Ruth, Director of the European Forum at
the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,

Dear Professor Ingenschay, dear Dieter, Director of the Institute of
Languages and Literatures off the Humboldt University in Berlin,
and for many years President of the German-Hispanic Association

Dear Professor Meyer-Minnemann, emeritus of the University of
Hamburg,

I welcome you, along with the ambassadors from Argentina, Co-
lumbia, El Salvador and Peru Portugal; the counselors from the
Mexican and Spanish Embassies.

IAFSL

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Excellencies,
 Colleagues and students,
 Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish not only to extend a warm welcome, but also to thank you for making, in some cases, the long trip to Leipzig in order to celebrate with us today.

Have no fear: I will not speak for long, but wish only to give thanks as it is due.

We who work in IAFSL each day know well our national and international standing. If we did not so, we would be unable to critique ourselves, and thus to progress and improve.

And yet it is still humbling to learn from different personalities of the impression made by our small organization. From the words of the speaker before me, it should be clear what IAFSL means to the University of Leipzig, as a part of the Institute of Romance Studies and as a leading representative of the departments of Hispanic and Portuguese Studies in the fields of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture Sciences. However, I have little hope that today's events will impress certain groups of our university.

About two years ago, an evaluation commission was sent to us that was made up of three members. Their goal was, I quote, "to develop a new concept for the future of our organization". The first reaction was to ask why an institute with such exemplary organizations as ours, as the speakers before me have shown to be the case for IAFSL, should require the services of such a small commission. I answered that we were working always with a projection in the future, that we were always developing new concepts and moving in new directions, discovering them, and building new theories for them. My resistance was fruitless, and one of the members of this *mini* commission emphasized the importance of such a group due, and I quote, to our somewhat "strange reputation" that our organization "enjoys in Romance Studies". You can imagine how perfectly objective this person was with regard to our institute. And still, the verdict was positive. What luck!

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, I'm sure you will see how gratifying it is for members of the Institute for Romance Studies and of the Ibero-American Studies to learn how outstanding personalities in our field and from elite universities see us; as our colleague Prof. Ingenschay and Prof. Fine have indicated.

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, the achievements of IAFSL we celebrate today were possible thanks to many factors:

First, we members of the board have been able to band together behind goals and, dare I say: visions, which we have unfailingly pursued with the utmost professionalism and energy. Here I would especially like to thank Dr. Gatzemeier, who has served for years as Co-Director of IAFSL. As you know, dear colleague, there is much that could not have been achieved without you! You are utterly indispensable and irreplaceable to our organization. The same is true of Dr. Ceballos, without whom we would never have been able to publish over 70 scientific volumes.

My former assistants and students Professor Gronemann and Professor Sieber, as well as our current assistants Dr. Tauchnitz and Richter, have also made instrumental contributions to our progress.

We have always had many partners who are extremely important to us. Sadly, I do not have enough time to introduce all of these persons and institutions individually in order to express the depth of our gratitude and indebtedness to each of them.

But I would like to mention the Rectorate of Cornelius Weiß, of which former Chancellor Dr. h.c. Peter Gutjahr-Löser (here today with us) and former Vicerektor Wartenberg were members. Vicerektor Wartenberg, who left us all too soon, spoke to us at the foundation of IAFSL (as did our colleague Prof. Meyer-Minnemann, who held the inauguration lecture 1994 and is holding the lecture to day). All three have made IAFSL possible, protecting and defending it in the face of envy and resentment.

In Rector Bigl, too, who is also no longer among us, we found a wonderful partner with whom we visited many countries in South America, cementing and deepening our connections on that continent.

But our greatest debt is to the Rectorate of Franz Häuser, especially to former Vicerektor for Teaching and Studies Charlotte Schubert. Together, we took public relations initiatives in science and politics. This was a defining moment for IAFSL that I will not describe at length, as the speakers before me have already done so to some extent. However, I would like to mention some key events: These include visits by President Lagos and President Bachelet, meetings between the ambassadors from Latin America and the Caribbean with IAFSL, the Germany-Latin America Dialogue and the Germany-Chile Dialogue, the bicentennial celebration of the independence of South American nations, and much more.

One of my fondest memories is travelling to Chile with Prof. Häuser, as the guests of Ms. Bachelet at her inauguration of her first period as president of Chile at La Moneda.

And without the powerful support of Dr. Sven Poller and Ms. Gräfenhein of our Foreign Students' Office, much of that would never even have been possible.

All of these events were organized in close cooperation with the City of Leipzig, a cooperation that began with Lord Mayor Tiefensee, and that with your help, Burkhard Jung, has become a marvelous and exemplary story. Here we have demonstrated in the clearest possible way how university and city, science and politics, must not be thought of as opposites, but as ideal complements of one another.

It is thanks to this cooperation that IAFSL has become part of the wonderful city of tradition that is Leipzig. For this, Mr. Jung, we are eternally grateful to you.

And speaking about the city of Leipzig, I could not fail to mention the work together with M. Oliver Zille. We met for the first time in December of 1992 in the Mädler Passage. I had just been appointed at the UL, and was not yet in office. Even while I was still a professor in

the U.S., we planned a first reading with Spanish authors that sadly did not materialize at that time. It was beyond crazy to begin such an undertaking from abroad, but at that time, anything was possible. Since then, he has always kept the doors open to us. He enabled us to put up our own stand at the Leipzig Book Fair and many other events. We thank him for that.

What concerns splendid public lectures with authors, I would like to take a moment to thank Birgit Peter, Director of Leipzig's Haus des Buches. Without her, many of the activities surrounding our readings could not have happened. These readings have been at once milestones and unforgettable evenings: rooms filled with listeners to Latin American, especially Chilean, writers whose works we translated into German. Some of them even attracted the attention of publishers, and soon translations of their work appeared from Suhrkamp, Fischer, and other publishing houses. Thus has IAFSL been able to contribute to cultural development.

For all of our events, we have always had the support of Sparkasse Leipzig and the Association of Donors and Friends of the UL. For academic conferences, we have been able to depend again and again on the DFG, the Humboldt Foundation, the German National Academic Foundation, and the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, etc.

Further, to this day, Embassies from South America, Spain, and Portugal remain our loyal, engaged, and highly valued partners.

But what might have happened if we hadn't been able to count on the continuous support of our institute, of our Faculty, and all of the deans that have led it?

These supports have included colleagues like Dieter Ingenschay and Michael Rössner, who have made significant contributions to our work, whether in IAFSL, on research projects and at conferences, or to our series of scientific publications.

And I must not forget our work with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, especially with Ruth Fine. Dear Ruth, we are so happy that you could join us today despite your full schedule. We have worked together since 1999. Our cooperation found its continuation with the BMBF project, in which we succeeded to bring together Israeli and Maghrebian scholars, and our cooperation now continues in a large-scale project that we, together with 8 partners, have submitted in the framework of the EU's Horizon 2020 program.

Dear Ruth I have to thank you and the authorities of the Hebrew University for the special greetings and congratulations of President Prof. Dr. Menahem Ben Sasson, and of Prof. Dr. Asher Cohen, Rector of the Hebrew University, but particularly for the remarkable support that we and I personally received for the preparation of the proposal, but also for the statement that your university is going to support us unconditionally for the case that the project is going to be accepted. That is the constructive way, I think, dear colleagues, in which universities should react in front of such a Mega-project and that is also the reason why your University, dear Ruth fine, is so successful in matters of gain projects.

Among these partners is Professor Marta Segarra from the University of Barcelona. Marta, we are delighted and honored by your presence here today as well!

I should also mention the close and productive cooperation with the episcopal Universidad Católica in Santiago de Chile. We are linked through two research projects, a great many joint publications, and an impressive number of joint doctorates and guest professorships.

I could continue with this list of friends and supporters for a good while.

Finally, I would like to thank all of our PhD and Post-Doctoral Fellows and candidates in Leipzig, and also all of you from other German and European universities and universities outside Europe, who have placed your trust in the IAFSL.

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, I will now come to the end.

This will be the last time that I am able to greet you at such a public event as the Director of IAFSL, and as a Chair-Professor. On September 30 of 2015, my career at the University of Leipzig will come to an end. From then on, I will only serve as a professor 'unofficially'.

For this reason, I have been working for some time to facilitate an orderly and efficient turnover at IAFSL. I leave IAFSL in the hands of Dr. Gatzemeier. Our series will be directed in large part by Dr. Ceballos and other younger professors and colleagues – for legal reasons alone, I, along with other long-time colleagues, will remain involved with this aspect. Dieter Ingenschay, Wilfried Floeck, and I, the founders of these colloquia for young scholars /the "Forschungstag"), have reorganized the research conferences and passed the torch to the next generation. I will leave our stand at the book fair to Dr. Gatzemeier and thus to IAFSL.

It is my wish that, starting now, the department and the Rectorate observe and understand what this organization means for the UL, and that they protect it from disintegration.

German universities have the sad tradition of vehemently destroying what a person has created when he or she departs, especially where it is of a pioneering nature, in a strange collaboration between the Rectorate, the department, and newcomers. Spontaneously I could name a dozen cases in the past years when exceptional fields have been quashed without anything remotely comparable being brought in to replace them – a mournful state of affairs.

Perhaps our university is better protected from this sort of vandalism. The former Rector, Prof. Häuser, was one of those who shaped the university motto "Tradition to broaden horizons" ("aus Tradition Grenzen überschreiten).

Here I urge you, Vice-rector Schwarz, dear colleague Prof. Schwarz, as representative of the Rectorate, to take distance from the plans to cut funding in the truly successful fields of Hispanic and Portuguese Studies at the Institut of Romanistic that have once again crossed

our desks. To do away with the professorship for Hispanic / Portuguese Language Studies and to drain our institute of teaching faculty would put an end to the existence of Romance Studies as an autonomous institute, with grave consequences – consequences that were recently described in *Der Zeit* by the Portuguese Ambassador here with us today. Dire repercussions would also be in store for the Ibero-American Institute, which deals in depth with the fields of language, literature, and culture within Hispanic and Portuguese Studies.

Still, I am extremely grateful to you, dear Prof.. Schwarz, for being here today, that's is really no easy for you, the situation of the Rectorate is no easy at all, our relations have, understandably, not been as fortunate as they might of late. No one likes to see cuts with such terrible consequences. Now, however, you can get a clearer idea of our situation, although the facts have been easily accessible on our website for years. I look forward to finding out whether the University of Leipzig's professed mission to maintain excellence and high standards will prove worthwhile.

We German scholars, who too frequently look to the U.S. and largely choose to incorporate the least advantageous elements of the North American university system into our own, could stand to learn how organizations like IAFSL are acknowledged, supported, and esteemed at North American universities, and also at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Professor Fine has told us something about this already.

I am grateful for your presence here today, and for your kind attention.

Thank you all!